John Armstrong

A Culinary student in-the-making.

Devin O’Rourke, a senior, was accepted to The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) recently but not for his academic achievements.

The CIA is a unique culinary arts school that has four different locations, three in the US and one in Singapore. Admittance to the CIA is highly selective, but the requirements are not like other colleges. the CIA requires that the applicant have a high school diploma or GED, one or more recommendations, take assessment tests, and work at least six months in a professional kitchen with fresh ingredients for at least a 10-15 hour week.

O’Rourke has always loved cooking and wanted to go to. He chose the CIA over other art schools such as Johnson & Whales because it has an actual campus and feels he can receive a better education there. Although there is no immediate culinary background in his family, he said, “My great grandfather owned a restaurant, but there was no great influence there. It just shows that it can be done, and it has been done in the past.”

The whole culinary field and profession is an industry of knowing people. O’Rourke has been working at the Bonterra Dining and Wine restaurant for ten months. He does everything from washing dishes to bussing tables. “The only draw-back is that my weekend nights are unavailable and so I can’t hang out with my friends,” he said.

Since an important part of the application process is recommendations, O’Rourke’s boss has been a great help. He said “My boss is a graduate of CIA, so he writes most of my recommendations and wants me to succeed.”

When accepted, the CIA has four main goals for its students. These include: developing a command of both classic and contemporary culinary methodology; preparing and understanding the many global cuisines that drive today's industry; expanding horizons in basic baking, nutrition, menu development, management, communication, and finance; and being ready to pursue such careers as chef, caterer and event planner, restaurateur, and hospitality and service manager.

The CIA places the applicants in a three year program with six weeks off. The students go on externships and experience different types of culinary styles. Over the course of the program, they decide what type of restaurant they want to work for. When they believe they have decided, they work in that type of restaurant to obtain a better idea of how it is run. Once they have a good feel for the restaurant and they graduate, they may either start their own business or work for one.